

# Elections Today

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NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF ELECTIONS

## 1 DETAILED MATTERS

by Paul DeGregorio

## 4 ELECTION OFFICIALS PERFORM WELL

by Richard G. Smolka

## 8 THE ORANGE REVOLUTION

by Taras Kuzio

### ELECTION CALENDAR

#### PRESIDENTIAL

Croatia (1<sup>st</sup> Round) - January 2, 2005  
Palestinian Territories - January 9, 2005  
Croatia (2<sup>nd</sup> Round) - January 16, 2005  
Senegal - February 7, 2005  
Greece - February 8, 2005  
(by Parliament)  
Central African Republic (1<sup>st</sup> Round) -  
February 13, 2005  
Central African Republic (2<sup>nd</sup> Round if  
needed) - March 13, 2005

#### PARLIAMENTARY

Maldives - January 22, 2005  
Iraq - January 30, 2005  
Denmark - February 8, 2005  
Thailand - February 13, 2005  
Central African Republic - February 13,  
2005  
Portugal - February 20, 2005  
Northern Cyprus - February 20, 2005  
Kyrgyzstan - February 27, 2005  
Tajikistan - February 27, 2005  
Moldova - March 6, 2005  
Micronesia - March 8, 2005  
Liechtenstein - March 11 & 13, 2005  
Tonga - March 17, 2005  
Somaliland - March 29, 2005

#### LEGISLATIVE

Andorra - March 1, 2005

#### MUNICIPAL

Saudi Arabia (Stage 1) -  
February 10, 2005  
Saudi Arabia (Stage 2) -  
March 3, 2005

## VOTING MACHINES AND THE 2004 U.S. ELECTIONS

### DETAILED MATTERS

by Paul DeGregorio



More than 7,000 election officials nationwide conducted the U.S. Presidential election on November 2 with the help of an estimated 1.5 million volunteer poll workers. Together, they served 121 million of their fellow citizens who voted in nearly 200,000 polling places on roughly a half million voting devices. The next day, Americans were relieved to find that the problems of the 2000 election had not been repeated and that the election had produced a clear winner. While supporters of each candidate may have felt differently about the outcome, both sides were relieved to find there would be no lengthy legal battle to determine who would occupy the White House.

As with any human endeavor, perfection in election administration is nearly impossible to achieve.

However, despite the extraordinary pressures of the 2004 election cycle, the majority of election officials throughout the country performed admirably. There were some problems, though, and they ranged from simple human errors (attributable to insufficient training of election volunteers) to technical issues that could have been solved by election administrators' implementation of fail-safe procedures.

These problems highlight the most important tenet of election administration: details matter. Most Americans believe that elections come together on their own and are unaware of the countless hours and sleepless nights that election officials spend preparing. The dedication of their fellow citizens—many of whom are older Americans, who serve patriotically as poll workers for an average of 15 hours on Election Day—is often overlooked. Most poll workers receive only two hours of training prior to each election for a job that has become more complicated due to new voting devices and federal laws designed to assist voters.

Should election officials ever forget why details matter, voters are increasingly ready to remind them. Gone are the days when election administration in the United States fell largely under the radar of voters, who seldom thought about the details of conducting elections. Election officials themselves have moved from obscurity to center stage, and Americans routinely have impassioned debates about voting systems alongside more familiar debates over the merits of candidates and ballot measures. These days, voters are making specific demands on local registrars and election boards about the types of voting systems used in their jurisdictions and the features of these machines.

Despite the generally successful conduct of the recent election, many citizens have particular concerns about one issue: electronic voting. While problems occurred on all types of voting systems, electronic voting systems (many of which were new) received the most attention. Advocates of these machines tout their

ability to enable voters with disabilities, particularly those with visual impairments, to vote without assistance. Voting rights advocacy groups support their use because they can display ballots in a variety of languages. However, a growing group of vocal activists has called into question the current use of electronic voting machines, engendering public debate. Among other things, opponents of these machines charge that they are supported by proprietary computer software that could be error-prone and that has not been adequately tested.

In the United States, electronic voting tends to be much more sophisticated and complicated than in other countries that use such equipment, such as Brazil, India and the Netherlands. In these countries, the parliamentary systems make possible much shorter ballots than those in the United States, where voters usually use a ballot that includes candidates for offices ranging from the presidency to local council member.

In general, electronic voting devices, which are now used by 30% of all Americans, worked well in the 2004 elections, even in those jurisdictions that had recently adopted them. Most voters appeared to have no problems using the new devices. However, the Election Assistance Commission (EAC)—whose mission is to improve the U.S. electoral process—is aware of mistakes made in isolated cases that nevertheless caused serious problems for some voters. The EAC will compile information about these instances, and we will share the results with the public and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), which is helping the EAC develop new voting system guidelines.


This work is part of an ongoing process of setting guidelines and improving performance. For example, in the summer of 2004, the EAC brought in election experts to help develop a best practices document containing solid information about how election officials and voters could utilize and secure electronic voting devices. Based on information collected nationwide, the resulting *Best Practices Tool Kit* covered areas like security, human factors and voter education. In addition, it encouraged the use of the national software reference library at NIST. This library can be used by vendors and election officials to store and compare software before and after elections. The *Tool Kit* has been used by literally thousands of local election officials to gain new ideas for overcoming election challenges by sharing successful and innovative ideas from jurisdictions of various sizes and geographic locations. (The web-based document is available to all interested parties at no cost on the EAC website, [www.eac.gov](http://www.eac.gov).)

Under the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), the EAC is charged with developing new voluntary voting system guidelines, for electronic voting machines as well as others. As dictated by HAVA, the EAC created the Technical Guidelines Development Committee (TGDC) to assist in the development of these guidelines. The TGDC is chaired by the Director of NIST and is made up of 14 individuals, who were chosen by the EAC and the TGDC chair. Its members include (1) members of the EAC Standards Board and Board of Advisors; (2) members of the Architectural and Transportation Barrier Compliance Board; (3) a representative of the American National Standards Institute; (4) a representative of the IEEE; (5) two representatives of the National Association of State Election Directors; and (6) other individuals with technical and scientific expertise related to voting systems. The TGDC began its work on July 9, 2004 and is working diligently to meet a HAVA-mandated deadline of April 2005. After the TGDC completes its initial product, the EAC Standards Board will review it and make recommendations to the EAC.

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Among the issues the TGDC is considering with respect to voting system standards is the requirement that voting systems be able to produce a voter-verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT). This issue has generated an enormous amount of controversy and has pitted voting rights groups, disability advocates, regulators and election officials against one another in a battle over the

need for a VVPAT. Though HAVA dictates that electronic voting machines possess an audit capability, it does not specify that this capability be in the form of a VVPAT. The EAC fully expects the TGDC to develop guidelines for those voting systems that could utilize a VVPAT, which will assist those election authorities that either mandate or choose to use a VVPAT with technical standards to guide their use. (In several states, the use of a VVPAT has already been mandated for all electronic voting machines.) The TGDC will also provide guidance on how to secure electronic voting systems—whether a VVPAT is used or not.

In spite of significant start-up and funding problems in its early days, the EAC had a very successful first year in 2004 providing support, guidance and significant funds to the U.S. states, the District of Columbia and the U.S. territories. 2005 promises to be another very busy year with voting system guidelines, the distribution of more funding and further sharing of best practices in election administration. 

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